

Democrat to oppose Schaefer

Montgomery Delegate Franchot plans to challenge state comptroller in the primary

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Del. Peter Franchot, a Montgomery County Democrat and outspoken critic of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., is scheduled to announce his candidacy tomorrow for state comptroller in 2006.

Franchot, 57, plans to challenge incumbent William Donald Schaefer, 84, in the Democratic primary. The longtime former Baltimore mayor and governor is a reliable vote-getter who has alienated many members of his party's left wing through support of the Republican governor and recent comments critical of non-English speakers and the state's minority business program.

"William Donald Schaefer has given many years of valuable service to the state of Maryland. But the time has come for a per-

son with more active, more progressive ideas to take hold of the reins of the comptroller's office,"

said Del. Curtis S. Anderson, a Baltimore Democrat and Franchot supporter.

Franchot has served in the General Assembly since 1987, and he chairs a House Appropriations subcommittee that controls transportation spending. By running for comptroller, Franchot will give up his legislative seat.

In addition to collecting tax money and regulating gasoline and cigarettes, the comptroller is one of three members of the state Board of Public Works, which authorizes most state spending and approves land purchases and other contracts.

Schaefer has been a swing vote on the board since Ehrlich's election in 2002, frequently siding with the governor — who has assiduously cultivated a strong relationship with Schaefer.

Supporters say Franchot's campaign will center on placing a loy-

al Democrat in the office who supports many of the party's positions, rather than one who frequently backs Republicans.

But Schaefer's allies note that he was the top vote-getter in the 2002 election and remains popular. Schaefer has endorsed Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan in the Democratic primary for governor, and he has indicated he would support him in the general election if Duncan wins the party nomination.

"The question is: Why is [Franchot] doing it?" said Michael Golden, a Schaefer spokesman. "All indications have been that the comptroller has been doing a great job as the comptroller."

Added Gene M. Raynor, a longtime Schaefer ally and former city and state elections chief: "Schaefer's integrity and experience — those are things that are going to matter."